



**1999**

# **Wastewater Certification Program Operator Update**

## **Certification Rule Revision Nears Completion**

Ecology's efforts to revise "Certification of Operators of Wastewater Treatment Plants," WAC 173-230, are coming to an end. This concludes over a three-year process of working with the Advisory Committee and operators on finding ways to improve the program and resolve certification issues with very limited resources.

Operators and the Advisory Committee identified exams as one of the most critical certification issues. One of the purposes of this revision was to address that issue by providing the ability to use updated certification exams. The revision will help to streamline administrative processes and to simplify the rating system for classifying wastewater treatment plants. The rule has also been rewritten so that it's easier to use. This action helps meet the Governor's Executive Order on Regulatory Improvement.

In the last year, presentations and discussions were held at operator section meetings of the Pacific Northwest Pollution Control Association throughout the state and at the annual Wastewater and Water Operators Workshop (WOW). Two workshops were held prior to the public hearings on the rule in July 1999.

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## **Another Y2K Issue - Meeting Your Professional Growth Requirement**

Each of us has been inundated with Y2K issues and concerns. Here, yet is another one to consider.

The professional growth-reporting period for over 1,400 certified wastewater treatment plant operators ends December 2000. According to certification program records to date, only about 400 operators have met this requirement. Meeting the professional growth requirement is one of the conditions for renewing and maintaining a valid wastewater certificate.

Unfortunately, many operators assume that when training is completed, the documentation is automatically forwarded to Ecology. For the most part, that does not happen. Operators are encouraged to submit documentation of completed training as soon as they receive it from the training provider.

Any operator who fails to document meeting the professional growth requirement is not eligible to renew their certificate for 2001. Renewal notices for 2001 cannot be sent to anyone who has not met the growth requirement.

### **Options for Meeting Your Professional Growth Requirement**

Any of the following four options may be used to meet the growth requirement.

- Earn 3 credits or continuing education units (CEUs) in a related course or training.
- Upgrade by exam in Ecology's Wastewater Certification Program.
- Become certified or upgrade by exam in Health's Water Works Certification Program.
- Become certified or upgrade by exam in the WA Wastewater Collections Personnel Association's Certification Program.

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Comments that were received from operators and owners of domestic wastewater treatment plants are considered in finalizing the rule language. Formal comments from testimony at the public hearings and written comments during the formal comment period are being compiled into a Concise Explanatory Statement (CES).

The CES is Ecology's response to each formal comment submitted. Anyone who testified or submitted written comments during the formal period will receive a copy of the CES. The CES should be available in November. Anyone who would like a copy should contact certification staff at 1-800-633-6193 or (360) 407-6449.

The next step in the rule process is a final review and decision by Ecology Director Tom Fitzsimmons by December 1, 1999. If Fitzsimmons signs the rule it will be adopted. The rule becomes effective 31 days after the adoption date on January 1, 2000.

## **Implementing the Changes**

The rule would result in the following changes if adopted as proposed:

- The February 2000 exam is the last time a free exam retake will be scheduled. Eliminating the free retake will help to cover the costs of administering exams.
- New applications (an application for a certification exam that you have not previously been approved to take) for the June 5, 2000 exam and any subsequent exams will need to include two fees.
  - a. A \$50 application fee payable to Ecology.
  - b. A \$20 exam fee payable to the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC).
- Applications to retake an exam will need to include two fees.
  - a. A \$30 retake application fee payable to Ecology.
  - b. A \$20 exam fee payable to ABC.

As part of implementing the changes, application forms for certification will be revised. A separate application for retaking exams is being developed that will be streamlined from the existing application.

New application forms will be mailed to every domestic wastewater treatment plant as soon as they are available. Applicants may use the existing applications to apply for the February 2000 exam. New application forms should be available in early 2000.

- Regular first class mail service will be used

beginning in March 2000 to notify owners of wastewater treatment plants of pending revocation of an operator's certificate for failure to meet renewal conditions. Any operator, who has not paid the renewal fee by February 29, 2000, will be sent a certified mail notice of revocation. Notices of pending revocation for failure to meet renewal conditions will continue to be sent to operators by certified mail.

- Wastewater treatment plants will be rated with the simplified classification system based on treatment type and design flow. Treatment types included in the rule revision are lagoons, biofiltration, extended aeration, activated sludge, wetlands, and tertiary. Beginning January 1, 2000, any new plant will be rated with this system. Existing plants will be rated under the new system when the discharge permit is being prepared for reissuance or when there is a change to the treatment plant or treatment processes.

It's important to remember that if a plant's rating changes solely due to the revised rating system, a provisional certificate may be offered to the operator in charge of the plant or to the operator in charge of a shift at the plant. These operators must already be certified and must continue to meet renewal conditions.

Another significant factor to note is that a plant may be classified at a level different than indicated in the proposed rule if any of the following apply:

1. If a plant has characteristics that make operation simpler or more complex than other plants in the same flow range.
2. If the conditions of the flow or use of the receiving waters require an unusually high degree of plant operational control.
3. If a plant uses an approved method of wastewater treatment that is not identified or included in the rule.

The proposed rule text is available for viewing through Ecology's website. The final proposed rule language will be posted on Ecology's Laws & Rules website in late November. The Internet address for that site is <http://www.wa.gov/ecology/leg/laws-etc.html>

## **New Exams in June 2000 – What to Expect**

Beginning with the June 5, 2000 exam, Ecology will use ABC's standardized wastewater treatment exam. Each exam is composed of 100 multiple-choice questions. Each question goes through a validation process and is evaluated. Exams are regularly revised and updated. The current passing score for each level is 70%.

The \$20 exam fee (payable to ABC) pays for the use of ABC's standardized wastewater treatment exam, exam scoring, and a diagnostic profile for each person.

The ABC reference guide is a list of topics that may be found on the exam and the recommended manual and chapter to study. The California State University (CSU) or Ken Kerri manuals are the recommended references. For information on the manuals, please contact CSU at (916) 278-6142. The reference guide for these exams is available from the Wastewater Certification Program and will be included in application packets for the June exam.

## **Interested in Participating on Advisory Committee?**

Ecology is soliciting certified operators interested in participating on the Advisory Committee for the Wastewater Operator Certification Program. This committee was formed in 1996 and its members include a representative from eastern and western Washington for each level of certified operators Group I through Group IV.

The Advisory Committee provides advice to Ecology on certification issues. While individual operator issues are not addressed through the committee, members help form policies that provide direction to the certification program. The Committee, in partnership with Ecology, developed the new language for the rule revision. The committee has been instrumental in working on a legislative bill that would fully fund the certification program.

Unfortunately, there is no funding to support Advisory Committee members' participation. Employers of committee members usually support their operator's participation. The committee usually meets at least 3 times a year. Members' terms are either 2 or 3 years.

If you are interested in participating on the committee, please write a letter of interest and send it to the certification program by December 17, 1999.

## **Wastewater Operator Certification Program Advisory Committee Report**

### **February & June 1999 Meeting Summaries**

The Advisory Committee met in Lacey on February 11 and June 16. Each meeting focused on possible changes to the certification program.

The February 1999 meeting centered on the legislative bill affecting operator certification. The bill proposed funding the certification program through operator fees and a certification fee for each wastewater treatment plant based on residential equivalents contributing to the system. Shortly following the February meeting, the House Agriculture & Ecology Committee and the Senate Environmental Quality & Water Resources held hearings on the bill. The bill was voted out of the Senate committee to the Rules Committee where it was not acted on. The bill did not pass out of the House committee. The bill, because it was introduced in the first year of a two-year legislative session, will remain "alive" when the next session begins in January 2000. If the bill fails to pass out of the Senate Committee then it will be "dead" and not considered for further action.

The June 1999 meeting focused on the rule revision effort. Members reviewed the public involvement plan and the proposed rule text. The committee agreed their recommendations would be based on two factors.

1. Protecting public health and the environment.
2. Impact to wastewater treatment plants and operators.

Much time was spent discussing the proposed rating system for classifying plants and the comments that had been received concerning the rating system.

The next meeting is scheduled for November 3 in Lacey at the Ecology building.

### **Committee Members**

The members of the committee include Russ Glaser, Clark Public Utilities; Jill Parker, Evergreen Rural Water; Jim Robins, Douglas Co. Sewer District #1; Chris Sheridan, City of Edmonds; Tim Pelton, City of Spokane; Joan Thomasson, Alderwood Sewer & Water District; Randy Casteel, Kitsap County Public Works; Cheryl Bergener, Water Works Certification Program; Melodie Selby and Myra Barker, Ecology.

## Certification Q & A

**Q: When are my CEUs due and what are the dates for my professional growth reporting period?**

**A:** Any operator initially certified before 1998 is in the reporting period that began in January 1998 and ends December 2000. Any operator initially certified after January 1998 is in a reporting period that began the date the certificate was issued and ends December 2003.

All operators are encouraged to send in training documentation as soon as the training is completed. You must submit your documentation by December of the last year of your professional growth reporting period to be eligible to renew your certificate for the next year.

**Q: I'm required to take First Aid every year. Can I use that to meet my professional growth requirement?**

**A:** Although many types of safety training are taken on an annual basis, they may be used only one time during the reporting period for credit.

**Q: How and when do I send in my training information?**

**A:** Either fax or mail a copy of your certificate. The certificate should include your name, the course title, the date you completed the training, and the credits or hours you earned.

**Q: What do I need to do to apply for the new exam next June if I failed the last exam?**

**A:** You'll need to submit a retake application and the \$30 retake application fee payable to Ecology, plus a \$20 exam fee payable to ABC.

**Q: What do I need to do to apply for a higher level of certification exam next June?**

**A:** You'll need to submit a full application and a \$50 application fee payable to Ecology, and a \$20 exam fee payable to ABC.

### CERTIFICATION EXAM CALENDAR

Exam Date	Application Deadline
2/7/2000	12/15/99
6/5/2000	4/15/2000
10/2/2000	8/15/2000

### For More Information Contact

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Wastewater Certification Program
PO Box 47696
Olympia WA 98504-7696
800-633-6193 or 360-407-6449
Fax 360-407-6426
TDD 360-401-6006

### Want to Contact the Certification Office by Email?

Ecology's website address is [www.ecy.wa.gov](http://www.ecy.wa.gov). Myra's email address is [mbar461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:mbar461@ecy.wa.gov).

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